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ABSTRACT

The arguments for evaluation as a service versus evaluation as an accountability function are debated. Proponents of the evaluation as service approach often argue that information requested for self-renewal is the information most likely to be used while those who favor accountability as the appropriate role for evaluation claim that people will seek out evaluation of themselves only if it is not dangerous to them personally. These points and others are argued point and counterpoint; a resolution between the two views is sought. (Author)

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Models for the Delivery of School District Evaluation:
Service or Accountability?

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Models for the Delivery of School District Evaluation:

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Models for the Delivery of School District Evaluation:
Service or Accountability?

Fuzzy thinking underlies many of the organizational schemas for evaluation in public schools today--fuzzy thinking about the purposes of evaluation and the underlying philosophies that govern the organizational structure of evaluation units to achieve those purposes. The way a school district organizes to do evaluation should directly reflect both its purpose in evaluating its program and its philosophies of administration and educational change. Evaluators themselves should be keenly attuned to these local ideas, either directing their work to the existing purposes and philosophies or working to change them.

The Austin ISD Office of Research and Evaluation was created three years ago in a district where the Board and public were clamoring for accountability. In reexamining our actions over the past three years as we have struggled to institutionalize this new unit, we believe we have been guilty of the fuzzy thinking alluded to above. We tried to serve up a "service" unit when the dish our paying clients were ordering was an "accountability" one. In fact, we found that we were unclear three years ago about who our real clients were and hence were misaddressing much of our work and reporting. Moreover, we think we were deluding ourselves with some romantic notions about human behavior change that the data simply will not support.

In the last three years, we have laid out two dichotomous models of "evaluation for accountability" and "evaluation as a service function." By examining these two models, we have come to better understand our organizational role. This self-examination has had concomitant effects on the focus of our work, the establishing of priorities, the external and internal organization of our unit, and particularly on our reporting formats and styles. Most of all it has helped our evaluation unit have an impact on educational practice in our district.

This paper first presents some concepts that underpin the two models to be described. Then it lays out the two models. These models are described first as two extremes, probably neither of which exist in pure form in any school district. A third model, a compromise of these two extremes, which can result from an analysis of these first two models is portrayed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Client for Evaluation

Client is a crucial term. Clients may be one of two types: client-purchaser or client-recipient. The distinguishing feature between these two types of clients is that the client-purchaser has direct power to purchase while the client-recipient may receive goods or services only if he influences those who have purchase-power to procure the services for him. Using this definition, the client-purchaser will be the administration (superintendent, board, and public) while the client-recipient will be the school personnel who might use the evaluation service for their purposes.

Evaluation Purpose

We define the purpose of evaluation as the use or potential use to which evaluation may be addressed. Our office identifies the ultimate purpose of evaluation as the improvement of student learning outcomes.

All clients, whether paying or using, will agree theoretically with this definition. Intermediate purposes, however, may not be so clear. While it is true that the public, school board, and superintendent may well have political evaluation purposes in mind, the school district staff may be even more "politically" motivated, because they have at stake the very personal purpose of professional advancement or job retention. Thus, evaluators are always faced with a political reality in which negative evaluation information is rarely well received. Glass (1975) has made us aware of the paradoxical climate in which evaluation information is generated and used.

Despite the problems associated with defining the purpose of evaluation, the wise evaluator should understand the environment in which he operates and the potential purposes for evaluation with both kinds of clients identified.

Philosophy and Evaluation

Throughout the history of man, two conflicting views of human nature have operated. In one view, man is viewed as innately good. As such, he will choose to behave rationally and kindly toward his fellow man, unless society (viewed as an evil corrupter) influences him to behave wrongfully. In the alternative view, man is seen as born with "original sin." Here, man is viewed as requiring exorcism of evil through baptism, training, or other continued vigilance. More modern philosophers may phrase this as innate self-centeredness. In education the basically good vision of man is expressed in the philosophies of Rousseau and such contemporary romanticists as Holt, Kohl, and Illich. The evil view of man is exemplified in the "world view" of Newton (Pink) and more recently the "fundamental school" and "basic skills" citizen groups.

Although the relationship may appear oblique, these philosophical dichotomies can be seen underlying the two models of evaluation as accountability or service.

TWO MODELS OF EVALUATION

1. Accountability Model

The clients for evaluation here are clearly client-purchasers-- the top level administrators, board, and thus indirectly the broader public. Their need of an evaluation unit is for a brief, reliable report on whether the program worked or didn't work in terms of products or student outcomes in order to make decisions. They will be particularly interested in cost information. Not only will they be interested in total program costs, but if there were achievement gains they will wish to know at what relative costs they were gained. They will need enough written backup data to be sure of the evaluation unit's competence, but they will not wish to hear this data in detail. If there is any process information of direct importance to outcomes, such as a major failure in the implementation of the program, they may be interested in knowing this. But they will not want to hear about the fine points of the process evaluation.

The philosophy underlying this model is that people act in response to directions from an authority and usually must be externally motivated to change their performance. Contrary to much of the recent human resources and systems analysis theorizing, this model postulates that in the complex world of human behavior, simple feedback on the state of the system will not be sufficient to change behavior. The immediate human costs for change are frequently so great that external intervention and orders from above are necessary.

Organizationally, the essentials that must be observed if the program accountability model is elected is that the evaluation should be an independent organizational unit reporting at a very high level of the hierarchy. This is necessary, because credibility is the most crucial commodity an evaluator has in this environment. The evaluator's clients will not have time to read his massive technical reports nor understand his fine statistics, but they must somehow be assured of his competence and integrity. Moreover, they must have confidence that his work will not be filtered of negative information. Thus, in the diagram of this model in Figure 1 the evaluation unit is hierarchically above the program unit. This position of the unit will also be crucial, because the total system is likely to become the natural enemy (overt or covert) of the unit.

INSERT FIGURE 1

If this accountability model of evaluation were strictly implemented, it would be the least expensive form of evaluation in monetary terms. Since communication and coordination with program or school staff and process evaluation tend to be the most time consuming and hence most expensive elements of evaluation, the reduction in importance of the downward flow of information in this model can reduce evaluation costs.

In terms of staff support, however, the approach strictly implemented will be the most "expensive." Staff resentment over the evaluator (as auditor) will gradually lead to distrust. This distrust in turn will interfere with data access and/or data reliability.

2. Service Model

The client in this case is the client-receiver (usually the program staff), and evaluation assumes a service role to that staff. In the

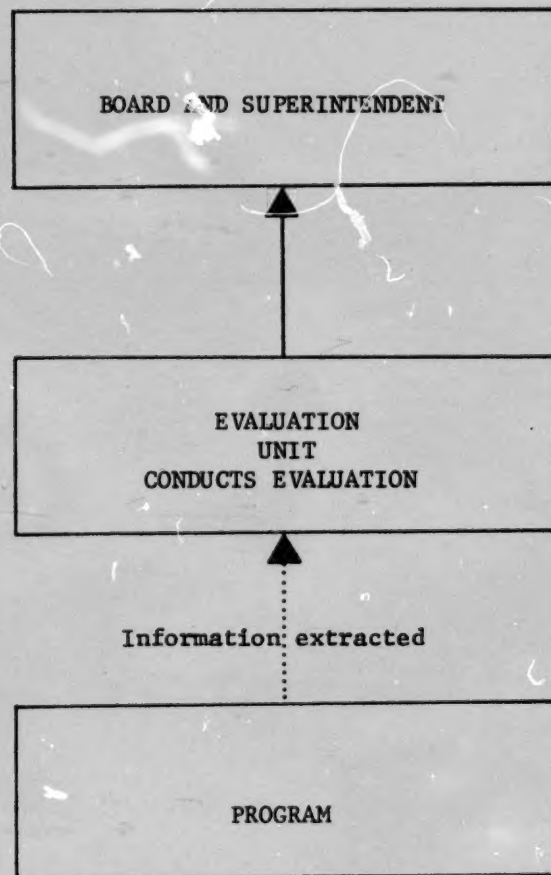
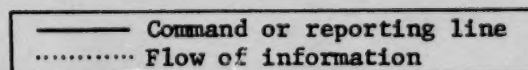


Figure 1: ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL OF EVALUATION



service model's purest form, the evaluation staff might provide to the staff only technical assistance such as statistical analyses or data processing. The evaluation staff might even report to the program staff administratively. This organizational arrangement is illustrated in Figure 2. The two-way directionality of information flow in this model as opposed to the previous diagram is the most important feature.

INSERT FIGURE 2

This model has its philosophical roots in the old rousseauian view of human nature: it is believed that man will opt for "good" under his own motivation--in this case, educational improvement. The underlying postulate is that people are always motivated to perform at their maximum level; evaluation serves only to provide accurate information about the state of the program or system. It is implied that no external motivation or threat is needed to provide change.

The evaluation staff following this model would be quickly attuned to in-course program changes and could pick up on process differences as they occur. Ideally, evaluation services would be requested at appropriate times, and the data would be immediately used by the program staff.

Several weaknesses are immediately obvious in this model. Most importantly, negative information is likely to be filtered out before reaching major decision-makers. This may lead to the retention of bad or weak programs. By the same token, the evaluation design may be at the mercy of the program staff. The clients may not request or approve appropriate evaluation resources, which will then lead to inaccurate or invalid data or its interpretation. The program staff is also unlikely to place a high priority on the long-term pay-offs of evaluation compared to immediate budget needs of the program. Hence, the allocation

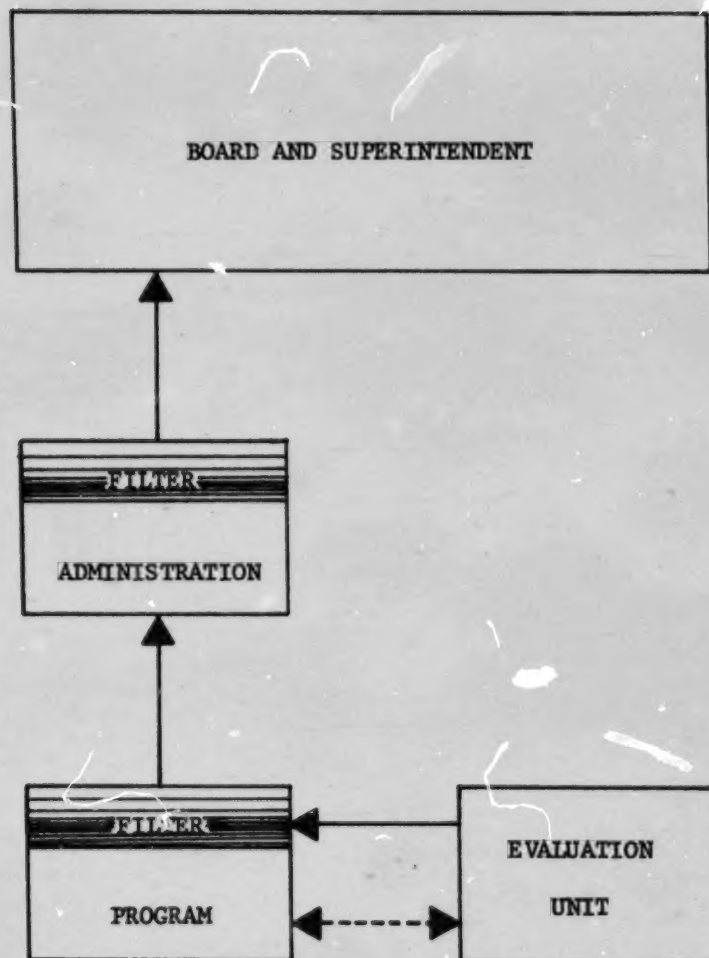
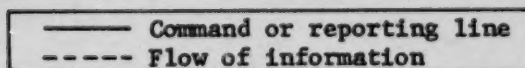


Figure 2: SERVICE MODEL OF EVALUATION



of sufficient resources to evaluation to provide adequate process and outcome evaluation will be unlikely. Inadequate evaluations can then lead to evaluation receiving even lower resource priority, and the downward spiral continues. Perhaps the most serious problem for this model for public school evaluators is that the information client here is not the money-paying client who must eventually support the unit with tax dollars.

THESE TWO MODELS AND REALITY (A THIRD MODEL)

Extensive literature on evaluation theory has appeared addressing such questions as the function and purposes of evaluation (Stufflebeam, et al., 1970, Provus, 1971, Stake, 1967) and the methodology of evaluation (Popham, 1974, Borich, 1974, Anderson et. al., 1975). Many of these earlier works have tangentially dealt with the internal organization of evaluation units, but none have really made explicit the alternate organizational ways in which evaluation services might be delivered within a local school district.

We believe these models of evaluation as service and as accountability may have more practical implications for the organizational realities faced by public school evaluation staffs than other extant theoretical work. Regardless of how well or how thoroughly evaluations are conducted, the translation of those evaluations into program actions is often more dependent upon the organizational role which evaluation plays than upon the study itself. We have seen numerous evaluations dropped into the great chasm of public school bureaucracy never to be heard from again because the evaluators lacked the organizational voice to have them heard.

The resolution of the competing concepts of human nature and behavior change which are implicit in the dichotomous models described above are not likely to be totally resolved anywhere and certainly not in the political

context in which public school evaluation occurs today. Thus, one is unlikely to see any school district evaluation unit organization that matches the models described. Indeed, most units will try to achieve a working blend of the two models just as we have over our three years of operation.

In the 1973-74 school year our unit began under an ESEA Title III grant to provide a model evaluation capability in our district. Again with fuzzy thinking predominant in our first year's work, we hoped to achieve accountability through providing information as a service to programs on the achievement of their objectives. We ranked low in the school district hierarchy that first year, reporting to a director who reported to an assistant superintendent who reported to a superintendent. Fortunately, we were established organizationally independent from the programs we evaluated, in direct opposition to some local administrative thinking. At the end of that year we communicated to the program staffs on how well they had done with their objectives. We did manage to get a school board review of those reports, but failed to secure any kind of staff or administrative commitment to program change. Not surprisingly, little program change occurred. The next year's funding from the district for evaluation was about the same--no substantial change.

By whatever yardsticks we could use to measure the effect of our evaluations on district programs that year, we had to rate our unit as a failure. At least, however, we were beginning to recognize what we should be doing.

The second year, we began to take a look at our own work and to analyze our operation and our reports. Thanks also to some fortunate organizational changes that occurred, we reported that second year to a

newly established deputy superintendent charged with overall responsibility for instruction and development. We decided that the pure "service" model, per se, was not a viable model and opted for a move toward the accountability mode. In reporting, this meant we emphasized not objectives but decision questions in our reports. An example is indicated in Figure 3.

INSERT FIGURE 3

We forgot our research "if and maybe" conclusions and opted for firm, best-indicated-course recommendations. Moreover, we began to talk face to face to board members and top administrators and to recognize that reports were less important than our personal availability when decisions were about to occur.

In this our third year, we have directly reported to the superintendent and recognize once again the greater impact of evaluation findings on action when input is given directly to the top administrative levels. We believe that our move toward an accountability model has demonstrated greater payoff for changing educational programs. Our current model of operation might be described as in Figure 4.

INSERT FIGURE 4

Nonetheless, we cannot say that a pure accountability model is viable either. "Service," after all, buys access to information, and any evaluation unit that hopes to continue functioning has to yield enough service to keep its data channels open.

Thus, we think we have come up with a blend of the "Accountability-Service Model" in which we acknowledge the true role of the "service" we can render. We do not believe that feedback of evaluation data alone will bring about change in people or in education.

Decision Questions to be Addressed by the IGE Evaluation

A. System-Level Decision Questions

Answers to these questions will assist the Board of Trustees and the Superintendent in making decisions relative to the continuance of the program.

1. Should the Individually Guided Education (IGE) Program be continued at its present level, expanded, or discontinued?
2. Should the IGE Program be implemented only in schools with student groups having certain identifiable characteristics?
3. Are additional resource inputs advisable if the decisions on the first and second questions are positive?
4. Are there any particular characteristics of IGE or individualized instruction whose implementation should be encouraged in AISD elementary schools?

B. Program-Level Decision Questions

Answers to the following questions will assist those charged with implementing the program in their decision making.

1. Should additional training be provided?
2. If additional training is required, should it be of a particular type?

C. School and Classroom Level Questions

Answers to the questions below will assist those charged with making decisions at the school and classroom level, e.g., principals and teachers.

1. Should adaptations or changes be made in the model processes of IGE as implementation proceeds?
2. Is additional resource help needed for the IGE implementation?
3. Do particular staff members or units need additional training or assistance in the implementation of the IGE program?
4. Are there certain types of students who may need to be given particular attention in the IGE classroom?

Figure 3: AN EXAMPLE OF A DECISION QUESTION TABLE

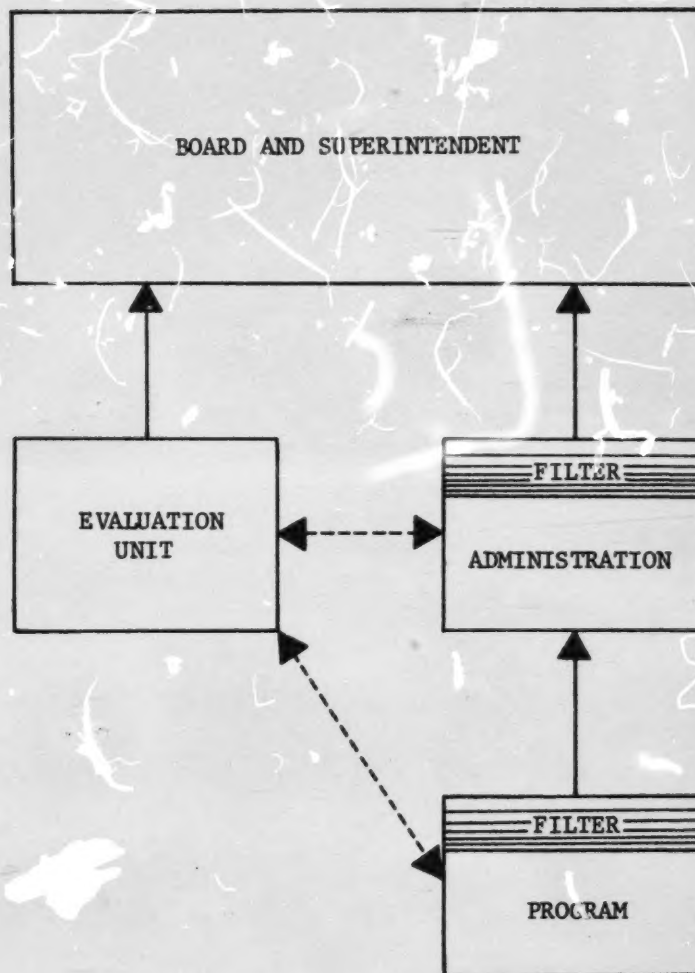
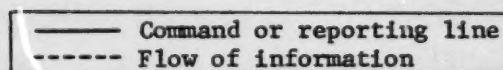


**Figure 4: ACCOUNTABILITY-SERVICE COMPROMISE MODEL
OF EVALUATION**



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